

Spain

Spanish Steppes in Winter

Sun 21st – Sat 27th January 2018



Trip photos (clockwise, from top left): Cinereous Vulture looking decidedly black at Monfrague • Great Bustards at Madrigalejo • Common Waxbill male • Not so Red Avadavat • Male Black Redstart at Monfrague • Griffon Vulture on the rocks • © tour leader Mike Crewe/Limosa Holidays

**Report compiled by tour leader:
Mike Crewe**

Spain | The Spanish Steppes in Winter

Tour Leaders: Fernando Enrique & Mike Crewe

Daily Diary

Day 1 – Sunday, January 21st 2018

Heading south from London, we were soon arriving in Madrid to far warmer weather than we had left behind (though that didn't last all week!) and before long we had met up with Fernando, sorted out a second vehicle and were heading out of town. We broke the journey at a wonderful roadside tapas bar, serving traditional local food and so different to the motorway service station experience of the UK! Continuing our drive past Red Kites, Common Buzzards and Spotless Starlings, we paused again, this time to check out a small wetland. Although the hoped-for geese were not present, we nevertheless enjoyed our first close encounters with Common Cranes and Spanish Sparrows as a taster of what was to come.

Closer to our final destination, our stop at a small wetland nature reserve gave us views of Western Swamphens, and our first taste of just how 'birdy' this trip was going to be – Common Chiffchaffs seemed to be feeding everywhere and a Penduline Tit wheezed from the bulrush beds. Marsh Harriers cruised overhead and in a nearby field, we tracked down our first Black-winged Kite. Refreshed by this birding extravaganza, we completed our journey and checked into our rooms, before enjoying our first taste of Belen's amazing Extremaduran cuisine – something that would become a major feature throughout the week.

Day 2 – Monday, January 22nd 2018

Mist lay in the valleys on our first morning, giving us stunning views of Trujillo, appearing as a sunlit island, floating across the sky. Our first day was spent taking a circular route around the open, grassy plains and *dehesa* to our north and it wasn't long before we were immersed in a mass of birds. We scoped an obliging party of Little Bustards, while also enjoying an impressive flock of Spanish Sparrows and the first of many Calandra Larks. A little further, we chanced across a party of nine male Great Bustards, which later gave great flight views when nudged into the air by a passing farmer. The grasslands were full of Spotless Starlings, Lapwings, Golden Plovers, and roving flocks of larks and finches.

Before long it was lunchtime, which we took at some well-situated picnic benches. Crag Martins, Black Redstarts, an early Barn Swallow and a fly-by Large Tortoiseshell ensured there was plenty to look at, then we were off again, pausing briefly to check out a small river bridge, where Spanish Terrapins were basking. Our afternoon was full of many more flocks of birds, while the warming weather brought out the raptors, with Griffon and Cinereous Vultures cruising the skies and the likes of Peregrine, Merlin and Hen Harrier putting in an appearance. A busy and bird-filled day, followed by wonderful Extremaduran cuisine and some wonderful Spanish wines.

Day 3 – Tuesday, January 23rd 2018

A foggy start gave us cause for concern, but we stuck with our plan to visit Monfrague National Park and this turned out to be a good choice – eventually! We started with a traditional drive up to the old castle, but we could barely see over the edge of the rocky outcrop due to the thick fog. We took the opportunity for some arty shots in the fog, but soon headed off to hope for better weather elsewhere. The 'vulture rocks' of Pena Falcon were similarly enshrouded and would have to wait until later, but things were brighter further on. Along the Rio Teitar, we found Griffons a-plenty and they were enjoying the sun that was now breaking through. An Otter eating lunch was a nice distraction from birds, before we pushed on to check out an open area of large Cork Oak. Very obliging Firecrests, Nuthatch and Short-toed Treecreeper entertained us here, before lunchtime loomed.

Lunch was taken at one of the purpose-built picnic areas in the park, and even here we added to our birding experiences, with a nice fly-by Great Egret and a roving party of Long-tailed Tits. A brief stop at the park reception area saw us enjoying Thekla Larks and a nice male Rock Bunting on the grass, then we rounded off our day at this fabulous reserve by enjoying the delights of Pena Falcon, which was now basking in sun. Here, large numbers of vultures bickered on the ledges, loomed overhead and gave great photo opportunities. A male Blue Rock Thrush posed beautifully and Sardinian Warblers and Black Redstarts fed on the ground in front of us.

Day 4 – Wednesday, January 24th 2018

Having savoured the *dehesa* and open grasslands, then the rugged hills of the area, we had another complete change of venue today, although the early morning fogs were to hold things up for us this morning. Plan A – a

search for more bustards – had to be abandoned for a while to allow conditions to improve, but we spent our time wisely and were soon enjoying several Wood Larks that posed really well for us in an area of open oakwoods – the famous Spanish *dehesa*. As the weather improved, we were able to cruise some scenic back roads and enjoy more sightings of both Great and Little Bustards, while Little Owls and Iberian Hares added to the day's diversity. A regular Stone-curlew winter gathering site proved difficult to work this year, as the birds were positioned in a place that we couldn't get to very easily, but we did at least enjoy some scope views of a closer individual.

We pushed on to one of the local reservoirs and, despite initial fears, the fog had lifted, so we were able to enjoy some good birding over lunch. Close Common Chiffchaffs and White Wagtails kept the photographers happy, ducks and an array of herons and egrets busied themselves on the reservoir and a Black-winged Stilt was a bonus find. A vivid green treefrog lurking low in a nearby willow, gave his location away by starting his spring call – a sign that the weather was already warming up. A cruise around the perimeter road gave us many more ducks and other waterbirds. Black-necked Grebes were at first distant but eventually seen close enough for us to enjoy that crazy red eye, while surprise find of the day was a juvenile Greater Flamingo, looking rather incongruous here. It had been a very full day with much to see and we were well set up for another food and drink extravaganza back at the hotel.

Day 5 – Thursday, January 25th 2018

After a run of days of chilly starts followed by sun, the weather took an unwelcome turn today and rain moved through the area. Determined to make the best of the day, we headed south to Madrigalejo and the complex of ricefields in the area. The rain held off for a while and we were able to make a stop at a small, bulrush-fringed pond where a Moustached Warbler has been spending the winter – a rare bird in Extremadura. We found our quarry quite quickly, though rather typically it mostly lurked in cover and views were dependent on lucky gaps in the vegetation. Penduline Tits also put in appearances here, too. A cruise around the ricefields gave us lots of wonderful views of White Storks and Common Cranes, the latter seeming always to be in view. Common Snipe and Green Sandpipers enjoyed the muddy edges and a dry ridge of higher ground provided us with a flock of 31 Great Bustards.

We headed to the little reserve of Moheda Alta for lunch, hoping to use the small hides there for shelter, as the rain was now setting in. Although a chilly draught blew through the hide, it nevertheless proved to be a wise decision and much of our time here was spent enjoying busy flocks of Red Avadavats and Common Waxbills, as well as five Spoonbills, a Great Egret and our second juvenile Greater Flamingo of the week. A large flock of Greylag Geese also provided us with two Barnacle Geese – a rare bird indeed in these southerly parts. The yucky drizzle continued and impeded our efforts to look for an Osprey that was wintering nearby, but we returned to base happy with our busy and productive day.

Day 6 – Friday, January 26th 2018

Back to vastly improved weather today with a frosty start giving way to a cool but sunny day. Fernando started by taking us to one of his favourite sites, where a roadside rocky outcrop provides a home for the range-restricted Black Wheatear. Careful scanning turned up a pair of these birds and started our day well. From here, we doubled back and headed off to the wetland reserve near Arrocampo. The swamphens were less helpful than they had been on our first visit, but Chiffchaffs were flycatching all over the place, Cetti's Warblers were very vocal and Penduline Tits showed very well. Along the wet edges of the grassy fields, we eventually had wonderful views of several wintering Bluethroats and we rounded off with a wintering Osprey, which was giving the local Ravens a taste of their own medicine!

We explored more of the area on this second visit and found a hunting Black-winged Kite, then a pair of Black-winged Stilts, while a lake amongst the nearby oakwoods provided us with a fabulous couple of male Ferruginous Ducks. Looking to plug a couple of gaps in our list, we walked through a wonderful Cork Oak area, hoping for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Whilst the bird eluded us, there was no doubt that everyone got great pleasure from being amongst these fabulous trees, their brilliant mahogany trunks looking spectacular in the dappled sunlight.

We took time off for good behaviour and headed into Trujillo for a wonderful walk from the town square, with its statue of Pizarro, up to the castle plaza with its spectacular and commanding views of the area.

Day 7 – Saturday, January 27th 2018

The inevitable last day was upon us and we said sad farewells to Belen and Juan Pedro before packing the vehicles and hitting the road. We found time for a quick scan of the Belen Plain and, though we didn't pick out any bustards, we nevertheless enjoyed ourselves as we soaked up all those larks one more time, then watched

three Red Foxes messing around. Further on, we checked out an area that is home to a resident pair of Bonelli's Eagles; they gave us a run for our money but we tracked them down in the end, sunning themselves in the warm weather. Our quest had also turned up a singing Cirl Bunting and a nice range of other roadside birds, before we headed back to the motorway and headed for Madrid, breaking for a lunch stop along the way.

Many thanks to all for your part in making this a wonderful winter break, full of good company, great food and drink, and fabulous birding. I look forward to travelling with you all again some time soon!

Annotated List of Birds Recorded

(Total species - 125)

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

A real bonus find of two with Greylag Geese at Finca Moheda Alta on 25th.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

A handful at Alcollarin on 24th then at least 150 at Finca Moheda Alta on 25th. The neck-collared bird seen on 25th had been banded in Norway in 2016 so was clearly getting around a bit!

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*

Three near Santa Marta on 22nd and five at Alcollarin on 24th.

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*

Plentiful at wetlands and seen on all but one day.

Gadwall *Mareca strepera*

Small numbers at wetlands and seen on all but one day.

Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope*

Small numbers noted at the reservoirs on 24th, 25th and 26th.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Widespread at wetlands throughout the area.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Local but noted in good numbers at Finca Moheda Alta on 25th.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Small numbers on 21st and 24th, then a nice gathering of birds at Arrocampo on 26th.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

A good scattering of birds at Alcollarin on 24th and a few noted on 26th.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya ferruginea*

Two brightly-coloured males near Arrocampo on 26th.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Two at Alcollarin on 24th.

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Small numbers most days – elusive since they taste good!

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

Two flushed from the track side near Madrigalejo by Mike's van on 25th.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Common around the reservoirs that we visited.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

A good number of birds on the larger reservoirs on 24th and 25th.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

At least five noted at Alcollarin on 24th.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

Single juveniles noted at Alcollarin on 24th and near Madrigalejo on 25th were a pleasant surprise.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Plentiful throughout the area, with many birds attending nests and the occasional 'bill-clapping' display heard.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Two at a roadside stop on 21st then a group of five at Finca Moheda Alta on 25th.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Common and noted daily, especially around cattle herds, but also in the rice fields.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Small numbers noted daily throughout.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Small numbers of overwintering birds with one to two on four dates.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Noted in small numbers on five dates.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Noted at wetlands daily with small numbers on all the rivers and main reservoirs visited.

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

A wintering bird was at Arrocampo on 26th.

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*

Singles on three dates, providing us with some great views of this attractive species.

Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*

Many pairs were already attending their nests at Monfrague, while others were seen regularly, cruising the skies over the plains.

Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*

Some great views of these birds spread over five dates – perhaps seen best over Arrocampo, where two cruised overhead, seemingly to check us out!

Spanish Imperial Eagle *Aquila adalberti*

Despite the rarity of this species, we managed to enjoy one on our first day before we had even reached our hotel! On our day around Santa Magasca, we notched up another three birds over the plains.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

A pair seen distantly over the plains near Santa Magasca on 22nd.

Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciata*

A final addition to our list, with a perched pair scoped from the roadside on our way back to Madrid on 27th.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

A scattering of single birds on four dates.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

A common feature of open areas, both around the rice fields and on the open grasslands.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

Noted on three dates, including a couple of wonderful 'grey ghosts' that breezed past us in search of lunch.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

Noted daily throughout and looking spectacular in the bright, Spanish sunlight.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Roadside birds noted daily throughout.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*

On 22nd, we tracked down flocks of nine and three birds on the plains near Trujillo. To the south of town, we located flocks of 12 and three on 24th, then found a wonderful gathering of 31 males near Madrigalejo on 25th. Always a trip highlight.

Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*

Perhaps best were the 18 we found feeding, early on our first full day of birding on 22nd, with another five seen later that same day. On 24th, we located flocks of 12 and 14, rather distantly in flight.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Heard calling on our two visits to Arrocampo.

Western Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*

Formerly Purple Gallinule, this species is doing quite well in south-west Europe and it continues to spread into new territory in Spain. Plenty calling and one or two seen quite well on our visits to Arrocampo.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

A scattering of birds around the better-vegetated wetlands that we visited.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

Only small numbers this year, but scattered here and there at most of the wetlands.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

A major feature of the holiday, with wonderful views and sounds of these birds on a daily basis. While the acorns of the Round-leaved Oaks have long been attraction for these birds in the winter, doubtless the great feeding opportunities around the relatively new rice field complexes in the area make this a heaven on earth for this species.

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicephalus*

A winter flock of at least 41 near Campo Lugar on 24th then a party of 15 in flight near the ricefields on 25th.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

One at Alcollarin on 24th then two singles around Arrocampo on 26th.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Plentiful on the grasslands of Extremadura with flocks noted on a daily basis.

European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

Small numbers scattered here and there on days that we travelled through more open habitats.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Small numbers seen at Alcollarin on 24th and Madrigalejo on 26th.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

One or two on four dates, teetering along the reservoir edges and along the river at Monfrague.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Two to three on two dates at the larger wetlands.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

One at the small wetland we stopped at along the motorway on our first day on 21st.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Small numbers noted around the grasslands but much larger numbers were wintering around the rice fields.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Just small numbers seen, with single figures on five dates.

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata*

A great year for this species with a total of around 75 birds seen in the Santa Marta area on 22nd.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*

A total of eight birds seen around the plains on 22nd – and we heard that wonderful bubbly chuckle!

Rock Dove/Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Noted throughout the tour with a wide range of colour forms present...

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Notable by their absence, with just small parties seen and no large gatherings this winter.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Small numbers daily, plus one or two larger gatherings at favoured feeding sites around towns and grain silos.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

A total of four seen around the Santa Marta area on 22nd, then another distant bird noted on 25th.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

One or two heard or seen at the various reservoirs that we visited.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Always a celebrity! You can never see too many of these birds, and we managed to see good numbers – almost always in pairs – on most days.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

A regular roadside bird with small numbers noted daily.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

A good year for this species with one to two noted daily from 21st to 24th.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

One perched on the ground at a distance during our circuit near Santa Marta on 22nd.

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*

A relatively common species in Extremadura with roadside singles and pairs noted on a regular basis. As Fernando said, any strange sound emanating from the landscape seems likely to be made by this species!

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Elusive and shy, one or two were noted at Monfrague on 23rd.

Iberian Magpie *Cyanopica cooki*

One of the star birds of the holiday, this species is now recognised as an Iberian endemic, after long having been thought to have been perhaps introduced from the Far East by early traders. This idea was laid to rest after sub-fossil bones of this species were found in caves in Gibraltar, dating the species' existence in the area to well before a time when any traders could have brought them here. Winter flocks of this bird can be impressive and on at least a couple of occasions we watched a party of around 60 or so trailing through the oaks near our hotel.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*

Common and widespread, but well upstaged by the previous species!

Western Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*

Local, but can occur in good numbers, such as around Madrigalejo.

Northern Raven *Corvus corax*

Some good numbers seen daily, including gatherings of over 20 birds on two occasions.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Widespread and common in woodland and around habitation.

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Widespread in woodland and around habitation.

Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*

A good year for this species, with feeding birds enjoyed around Madrigalejo and at Arrocampo.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

Noted on four dates with lovely views of eight on 24th and seven on 26th.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Noted at scattered locations on three dates in small flocks.

Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae*

Widespread but local and more often in uncultivated areas and areas of rocky ground than is the case for Crested Lark. Some obliging birds allowed close views, revealing their heavily spotted chests and stubbier bills, as well as their distinctive contact calls.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Widespread and common and often filling the niche of a European roadrunner!

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*

Common in suitable habitat, with the largest numbers seeming to favour land where there had been at least some cultivation. The wonderful rolling song of this species, with much mimicry thrown in, as well as its distinctive long wings with dark undersides and white trailing edges are a great feature of the area.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Very few around this winter for some reason, with just one to two noted on three dates.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Small numbers seen on four dates, including at least 14 at Santa Marta and some nice views of perched birds at Trujillo.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Top award for skulking always goes to this species, which has no physical form – just a voice on the breeze! Heard most days but we only ever had brief glimpses.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Not uncommon in the more rugged areas around Monfrague and Alcollarin, with some good close views of birds at the former site, allowing us to see the subtle plumage differences between these and British birds.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Delightfully common and actively flycatching, especially around the margins of waterways.

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*

A bonus bird for the trip, with one wintering on a small pond near Almendralejo and seen there on 25th.

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

Little skulkers, but we had some good views of roadside birds on a couple of occasions.

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Often heard calling around the hotel and in wooded and scrubby areas elsewhere. Seen well around Monfrague, where birds were feeding on wild olives.

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*

Rather quiet this year, but we had nice views of a roadside bird near Campo Lugar on 24th.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*

Widespread and common. Some lovely views at Pena Falcon where birds were feeding on the open ground.

Common Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

We had some nice close views of this little cracker around Monfrague and Alcollarin.

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Heard most days but, typically, not seen too well – though we maybe didn't try too hard!

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

One showed very well in Cork Oaks at Monfrague on 23rd.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*

One showed very well in Cork Oaks at Monfrague on 23rd and others were heard on 24th.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

A few birds scattered around the open plains but we didn't look hard enough to really comment on numbers.

Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*

Widespread and very common. The song of this species is very different to that of Common Starling, though both species use much mimicry, and the rolling notes of Spotless Starlings were a regular feature of towns and villages in the area, as well as out in the *dehesa*.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Widespread in small numbers and noted daily.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Shy and retiring, one to three birds noted daily, mostly around the hotel first thing in the morning. Sadly, this fast-declining species continues to be shot for pleasure in parts of southern Europe...

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

One to two on four dates, usually in oak *dehesa* country.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Widespread in small numbers and always a component of dawn chorus at the hotel each morning.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

At least three seen at Arrocampo after a bit of a search on 26th. Males showed plumage characteristics of the more southerly 'White-spotted' form, *cyanecula*.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Small numbers seen daily with some fine adult males noted.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

One to three on three dates, either on rocky outcrops or in small towns.

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Very common and seen daily in good numbers on roadside fences, wires and bushes.

Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura*

Fernando's little spot came good again, with a pair of this sadly declining species posing nicely for us.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Wonderfully common around towns, villages and out in the wider countryside. A much-maligned bird but in serious decline throughout much of its natural range.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*

Plentiful and most often seen in wheeling flocks on the grasslands or *dehesa*. Some good close views at times of this very smart bird.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

At least one in the skittish sparrow flocks at Finca Moheda Alta on 25th.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*

A single bird found by Fernando at Campo Lugar was a nice addition on 24th.

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*

Some fabulous views over lunch at Finca Moheda Alta of this attractive but introduced species.

Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava*

After much angst, we were spoiled with prolonged close views of these during lunch at Finca Moheda Alta.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

A scarce but regular winter visitor in Extremadura, we found singletons on four dates.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

One to three noted on three dates, mostly along rivers or streams.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Very common with some sizeable gatherings noted, both in open grassland and in the rice fields and around reservoir edges.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Common in open areas and noted throughout the area each day.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Widespread in small numbers and generally less common than most of the other finch species, but small gatherings around Monfrague National Park did give us a chance to enjoy them.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Small parties noted here and there with regular views outside the hotel first thing in the morning.

European Serin *Serinus serinus*

Small parties noted here and there, but this little manic bird is always hard to really pin down.

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Small numbers heard or seen daily.

Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Small numbers noted daily but often only fly-bys.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Plentiful, with busy parties of birds noted throughout the region on a daily basis.

Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus*

Scarce, with some of the group logging a fly-over on 23rd at Monfrague.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

An abundant species throughout the open grassland habitats and noted in good numbers daily.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirius*

One sang while we were scanning for the Bonelli's Eagles but we only glimpsed a shape flying away.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*

A nice male fed quietly on the grass at Monfrague on 23rd.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Two seen in the ricefields on 25th and one at Arrocampo on 26th.

Mammals**Red Deer *Cervus elaphus***

Several noted around Monfrague on 23rd and seen from the roadside on 26th. These southern animals are generally slighter in build than the larger animals typically found in the UK.

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Small numbers on three dates.

Iberian Hare *Lepus granatensis*

One or two roadside animals seen on 24th and 25th. A larger animal with proportionately larger ears than Brown Hares (*Lepus europaeus*). They are also more strongly marked on the ears and whiter below.

European Otter *Lutra lutra*

One feeding on fish at Monfrague on 23rd and another near Madrigalejo on 25th.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Three were mooching around the plains near Belen on 27th.

Reptiles**Spanish Pond Terrapin *Mauremys leprosa***

Several noted basking on rocks along the Rio Magasca during our picnic lunch on 25th.

Geniez's Wall Lizard *Podarcis virescens*

Seen nicely at Alcollarin on 24th. The Iberian Wall Lizard has been split into several new species, most of which can only readily be identified in the field by their distribution.

Amphibians**Iberian Tree Frog *Hyla molleri***

One posed perfectly for the cameras at Alcollarin on 24th. The European Tree Frog has now been split into four species, with this one restricted to the Iberian Peninsula and a small part of SW France.

Butterflies

Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*), and Large Tortoiseshell (*Nymphalis polychloros*) were the only species positively identified – but it is January!

Moths

On a daily basis we noted an abundance of the larvae of the Winter Webworm (*Ocnogyna baetica*) scattered across the ground and offering great feeding opportunities for any Great Spotted Cuckoo that might decide to make an early return to the area!

Flora

Any time of year there's always an array of flora to be enjoyed and the trip report could be doubled in length to accommodate all the plant species seen. But we'll keep it short and just note, for the record, the species that I know people photographed and asked about. These included the tiny daffodils that were still in bud this year at Monfrague, which were *Narcissus triandrus pallidulus* and the arum that Alison found in flower at Alcollarin, which was *Arisarum vulgare*. By the bridge near Santa Marta, we found the celandine-like, Autumn Buttercup (*Ranunculus bullatus*). There was also interest in the tiny white flowers of what I at first thought was Coral-necklace (*Illecebrum verticillatum*) but it turned out to be a closely-related species – *Corrigiola telephiifolia*.